

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the government as well as the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) governor to come up with a proposal for investing the donation of Rs9.1 billion for the Diamer-Bhasha and Mohmand dams in government treasury bills.

A five-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar, which had taken up a case relating to the campaign/propaganda against the dams, issued the directives after SBP Governor Tariq Bajwa informed the court that the donations so collected could be invested in the treasury bills for three months after which they could be injected into the bonds, which the government would float for generating funds later for the construction of the dams.

The court also asked the Federal Bureau of Revenue (FBR) chairman as well as Attorney General Anwar Mansoor to get instructions from the government and float a proposal for converting the annual withholding cess of Rs36bn on mobile phone charge cards as well as Rs10bn imposed on mineral water companies annually for the extraction of water from aquifer into 'surcharge'. The surcharge would be similar to the specific funds like the Neelum-Jhelum surcharge so that the funds, instead of going into the consolidated funds, could exclusively be diverted to the dam funds, the court said.

"We want to keep reserve resources so that in case of incapacity on the part of the federal government to fund the dam, the development work should not be impeded in future," observed the chief justice.

| CJP praises media for supporting the cause of building water reservoirs

The court appointed eminent jurists Makhdoom Ali Khan and Dr Pervez Hassan as amici curiae to assist the court in the matter. It also constituted an implementation bench, the composition of which will be announced by the chief justice later.

During the hearing, the chief justice appreciated the role of the electronic and print media in supporting the cause of building water reservoirs. He observed that the role played by the media was a reflection of their patriotism. However, only a few sections of the media had aired negative or partisan programmes which were very negligible, the chief justice said.

The observations came when Chairman of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Pemra) Mohammad Saleem Baig furnished a report stating the 23 television channels aired 76 talk shows and only touched the aspect regarding the award of the contract and never said anything against the dams fund.

The media also ran free of cost advertisements promoting the cause of dams fund which in terms of money, if calculated, amounted to Rs30bn. The advertisements were aired during the prime time and thus every channel contributed to the benefit of the dams

fund without any criticism, the Pemra chairman said, adding that the channels had also carried the rebuttal issued by the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda).

The court took to task anchorperson Gharida Farooqi of GNN TV for airing a programme in which she had described award of the contract to Descon as murder of the merit for violating rules. A clip of the programme was shown in the courtroom, but the anchorperson explained that the programme also contained the viewpoint of Wapda chairman Muzzamil Hussain. The court cautioned Ms Farooqi to be careful in future.

Justice Ijaz-ul-Ahsan also asked Pemra to show some teeth through effective control to regulate the electronic media.

The Wapda chairman informed the court that development work for the construction of Mohmand dam had commenced. He said the construction of spillways, power house and reservoir filling of the dam would be completed by May-June 2024 at a cost of Rs310bn.

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